



Aspirant Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) Development Programme

Twelve Month Evaluation - October 2024

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Background

Lead Cancer Nurses (LCNs) within the East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) region have shared concerns regarding difficulties surrounding recruitment into vacant cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS) posts, as highlighted in pre and post-pandemic reports including Macmillan's *Cancer Workforce in England* census (2017), *Addressing the Gap* (2020) and *Cancer Nursing on the Line* (2021). With an already stretched workforce (some of whom were approaching retirement), the need to develop and nurture local ambition, equipping registered nurses interested in cancer CNS posts, evolved into the idea of a development programme.

The intention of the programme was that participants (knowns as 'Aspirants') would have access to training, education, and local experiential learning, to enhance their skills and enable them to apply for cancer CNS roles as they arose. Having struggled to shortlist applicants for posts in the past, the desire to 'Grow our Own' laid the foundation for the **EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Specialist Development Programme**, which was officially launched 9th October 2023. This review of a full year since the launch, will build on the six-month report (published April 2024) to offer an insight into the achievements, amendments and considerations for the sustainability of the Programme as an embedded asset for the workforce. The programme has since been shortlisted for an award celebrating collaborative working (due November 24).

Setting the Scene

The East Midlands Cancer Alliance (EMCA) footprint spans a 5.2million population and supports eight Secondary Care Trusts across five separate Integrated Care Systems (ICS) providing cancer treatment to patients covering multiple tumour sites and is committed to the development of the cancer CNS workforce. Cancer CNSs are a key resource within our Alliance in supporting people affected by cancer; as well as leading service developments that improve cancer care.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the number of people living with a cancer diagnosis is set to double from more than 2 million in 2021 to 4 million in 2030. To support people affected by Cancer, the specialist cancer workforce currently needs an additional 2,500 specialist cancer nurses, an increase of 84%. By 2030, the gap between patient need and workforce capacity will have grown to 3,700 nurses, an increase of 123%.

Overview of the programme

Expanding on the ideas of the EMCA LCNs and other stakeholders, a gap analysis was produced by the Programme Lead and shared with the forum in 2023. Once a consensus of what should be included was reached, separate feedback forums for Aspirants (those who may be considering a career as a cancer CNS) and Coaches (experienced professionals already working within a cancer CNS post) were created.

Working collaboratively with Volute (a design company with vast experience of working with the NHS) and the feedback forums, to develop an online learning management system (LMS)), the stakeholder group designed a structured approach to modules essential in caring for a person affected by cancer.

Designed to offer registered nursing staff an *introduction* to the role of a cancer CNS, Learners (here 'Aspirants') are encouraged to set up their own private learning account. The Programme offers free, asynchronous learning that can be accessed conveniently at a time and location to suit, using a personal computer or tablet/mobile phone, directing Aspirants through readily available, high-quality resources that are interactive and informative, covering the following sections:

- Welcome and Introduction
 - Background
 - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
 - NHS Long Term Plan
 - The NHS Workforce Plan
 - ACCEND Programme
- Clinical Practice and Scope of Role
 - The role of the cancer CNS
 - Patient Advocacy
 - MDT Working
 - Safeguarding
 - Communication
 - Governance: Data security and information sharing
 - Research and evidence-based practice
 - Level 2 Psychology
 - Leadership
- Cancer
 - Biological basis of cancer: the cell and cell cycle
 - Screening and prevention
 - Diagnosis
 - Staging and grading
 - Genomics
- Intervention
 - Surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy
 - Hormone therapy, Targeted Cancer Therapies, Immunotherapy and Topical anti-cancer agents
 - Impact of cancer therapies
 - Supportive and Palliative Care
- Personalised Care and Support Interventions
 - Personalised Stratified Follow Up (PSFU)
 - End of Treatment Summaries
 - Cancer Care Review
 - Health and Wellbeing Support
- Clinical Supervision

Learning can be accessed immediately, does not require facilitation and is non-linear so can be tailored to the individuals' needs, whilst also offering consolidation of learning through simple quizzes.

Feedback is collated through feedback forms before and after participation in the Programme and we are very proud to share that the programme has been **accredited** by The Continued Professional Development (CPD) Certification Service, the logo for which is included on the Certificate Aspirants receive demonstrating 20 CPD points for their completion of the programme.

Aspirants are provided with a branded template for reflective writing adapted from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) forms to be used in their Revalidation and professional portfolios.

The Programme complies with the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations (2018), ensuring that it meets the needs of neuro-divergent learners and is situated on the EMCA website, transforming services, workforce tab, the Programme can be accessed easily. Access is also easy via the QR code or the unique URL address: [EMCA Aspirant CNS Development Programme](#); without the need to request logins. See below:

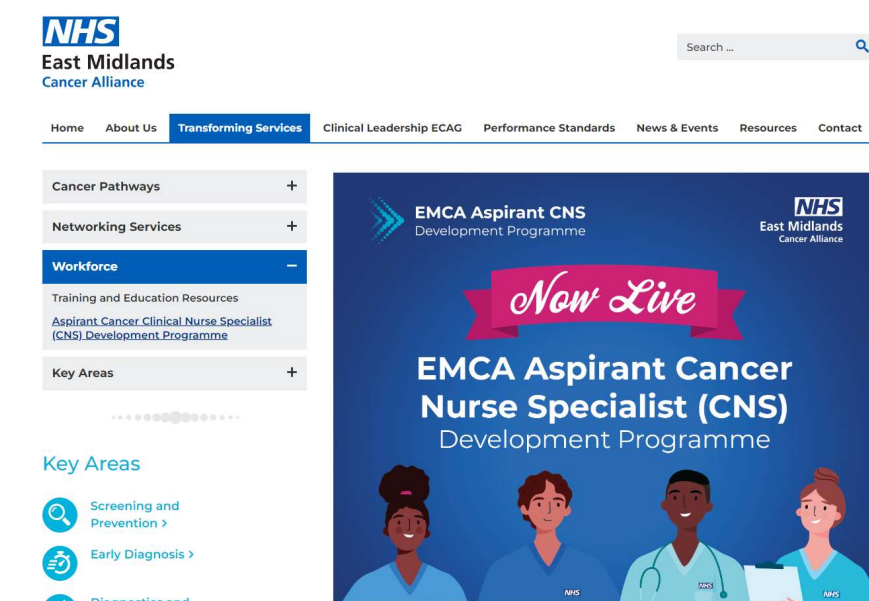


Image 1: screen shot of Programme on EMCA website

Developed from autumn 2022, prior to the NHS Health Education England's Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development programme (ACCEND), the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme was officially launched on 9th October 2023. Not only will the programme increase the number of CNSs trained to provide expert specialist support for every person living with and beyond cancer, it will also boost staff morale, enhance recruitment and improve retention.

[NHS Health Education England's Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development programme \(ACCEND\)](#)

Aspirants are directed to the ACCEND Programme and advised to familiarise themselves with this, as this will be implemented within their Trusts soon. In addition to the current

offering for the 'supportive and assistive' workforce, there will also be additional eLearning opportunities available for 'registered, enhanced towards advanced' (RETA) staff in the future.

The EMCA Programme has been mapped against the ACCEND Framework (Sept 24) which Aspirants and Managers confirm, links well with the aspirations and knowledge gaps of those within the cancer workforce (or Aspirants wishing to join it). To further support this, further modules were added to the programme (Sept 24), since its launch.

These new modules include teaching on *Trauma Informed Care, Safety Netting of Patients, Frailty in Cancer, Oncological Emergencies, Prehabilitation, Rehabilitation & Personalised Care, Health & Wellbeing Support – Eating Well and Keeping Active*. Additional teaching resources were added to existing modules to enhance learning in those areas, these include *Holistic Needs Assessments* and *Consent*. These additional resources also help ensure the Programme is attractive to primary and tertiary care professionals, as well as those within the secondary care setting.

Qualitative feedback

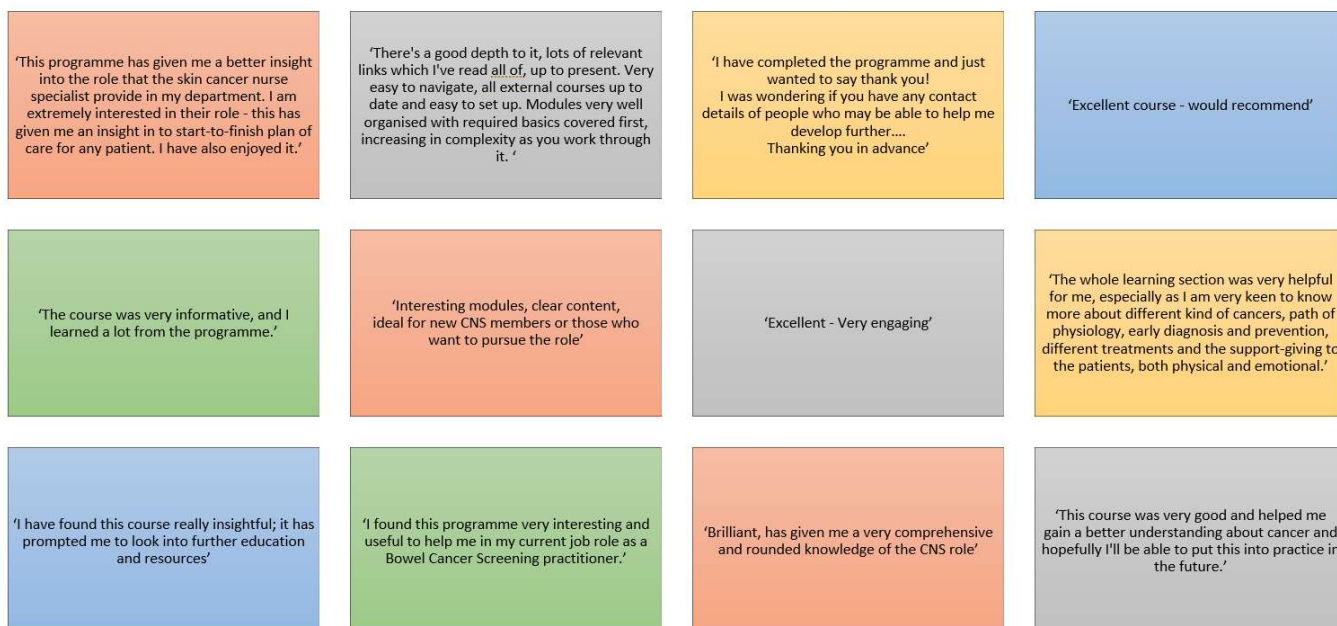


Image 2: qualitative feedback

As shown above, some of the feedback from Aspirants so far has included:

- 'Excellent - Very engaging'
- 'Excellent course - would recommend'
- 'There's a good depth to it, lots of relevant links which I've read all of, up to present. Very easy to navigate, all external courses up to date and easy to set up. Modules very well organised with required basics covered first, increasing in complexity as you work through it.'
- 'The course was very informative, and I learned a lot from the programme.'
- 'Brilliant, has given me a very comprehensive and rounded knowledge of the CNS role'

- 'I have found this course really insightful; it has prompted me to look into further education and resources'
- 'This programme has given me a better insight into the role that the skin cancer nurse specialist provide in my department. I am extremely interested in their role - this has given me an insight in to start-to-finish plan of care for any patient. I have also enjoyed it.'
- 'The whole learning section was very helpful for me, especially as I am very keen to know more about different kind of cancers, path of physiology, early diagnosis and prevention, different treatments and the support-giving to the patients, both physical and emotional.'
- 'I found this programme very interesting and useful to help me in my current job role as a Bowel Cancer Screening practitioner.'
- 'I have completed the programme and just wanted to say thank you! I was wondering if you have any contact details of people who may be able to help me develop further.... Thanking you in advance'
- 'The course was very informative, and I learned a lot from the programme.'
- 'Interesting modules, clear content, ideal for new CNS members or those who want to pursue the role'

There has also been significant engagement from other Cancer Alliances, including Wessex Cancer Alliance and West Midlands Cancer Alliance, who have shared the EMCA Programme to their workforce. We have seen Aspirants sign up to the programme from around the UK and Northern Ireland.

Recent feedback from two Aspirants highlighted an issue with some of the links having been retired and were unavailable. The Programme Lead investigated this and found that some of the assets on the eLearning For Healthcare platform had been retired and it was necessary to revised these and redirect Aspirants to the NHS Learning Hub. Where this had happened both Aspirants who had reported this issued were contacted and informed this had been corrected within 24 hours, should they wish to revisit those sections previously affected.

Consulting with Volute, a software programme has since been installed to check for broken links every 72 hours and to notify the Lead, who can act to remediate this swiftly.

Metrics

EMCA Aspirant CNS Development Programme	
12 months data: 9.10.23-8.10.24	9.10.23-8.10.24
Metric	
Total number of visitors to site	3,133
Total number of views	21,380
Page views per visit	6.82
Number of people accessing the Aspirant Nurse Programme (new account set ups)	430
Completed Pre-Course Evaluation Forms	230
Completed Post-Course Evaluation Forms	70
Of the completed pre-evaluation forms:	
Pay Band 3	2
Pay Band 4	3
Pay Band 5	97
Pay Band 6	99
Pay Band 7	23
Pay Band 8/Blank/Other	6
Role: Registered Nurse	207
Role: Allied Health Professional	8
Role: Blank/Other (including Student Nurses, CSWs etc)	15

Image 3a: Snippet of metrics 9.10.23-8.10.24 (365 days data)

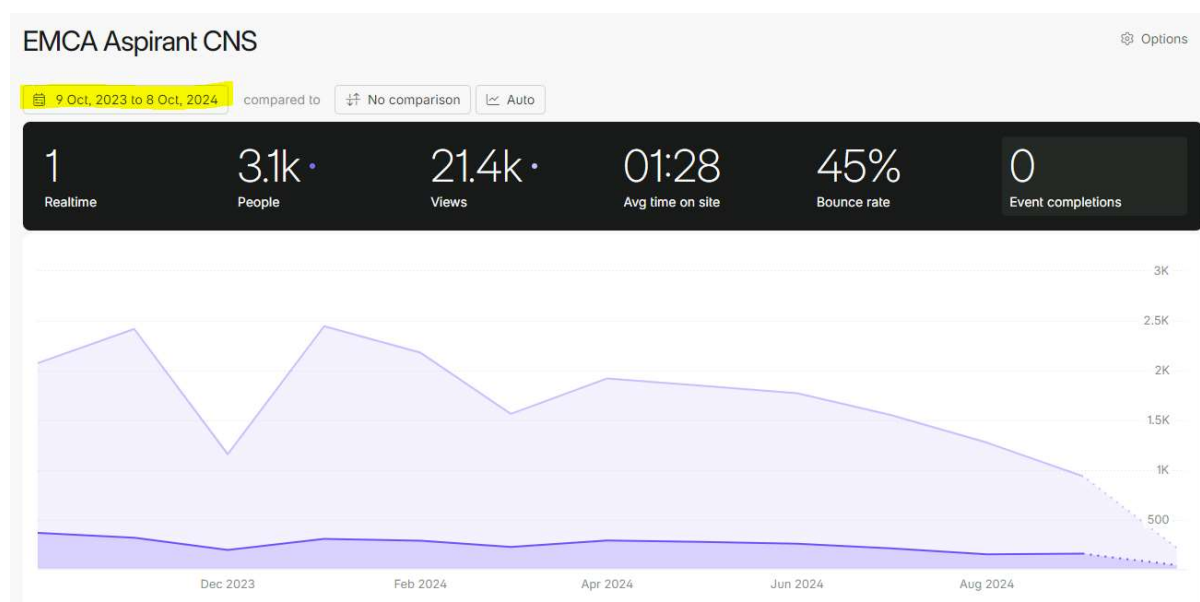


Image 3b: Snippet of metrics 9.10.23-8.10.24 (365 days data) – Fathom Analytics

The above snippets demonstrates the metrics by which the Programme has been evaluated, including the number of visitors to site and views, learning accounts set up and evaluation forms completed (we have collected pre- and post-course data).

Within twelve months, the Programme has been visited by more than **3,133 people**, more than **21,380 times** with more than **430** of these people setting up **personal learning**

accounts. Pre-Course Evaluation Forms have been completed by **230 Aspirants** with **70** having **completed all the Programme and the Post-Course Evaluation Forms**.

The data received enables us to analyse the demographics of those accessing the Programme, clearly demonstrating that it is reaching far beyond the initial target audience of approximately 25 band 5 registered nurses (as shown below) we had hoped to engage with; reaching many more additional roles and bands.

Images 4 and 5 demonstrate that in addition to Band 5 Registered Nurses, a large number of Aspirants are Band 6, with others across the pay scale also finding the Programme beneficial. Whilst initially scoping the Programme for Registered Nurses, the data collated here also shows that current CNSs, Care Support Workers and other healthcare professionals, have also engaged with and benefitted from this online learning programme.

In addition to Aspirants from around the EMCA region, uptake by Nurses and AHPs from the following (and many more), can also be evidenced:

- Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust
- Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust
- East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Foundation Trust
- East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust
- Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
- And others

Aspirant Demographics by Pre-Course Evaluation form (Online Programme)

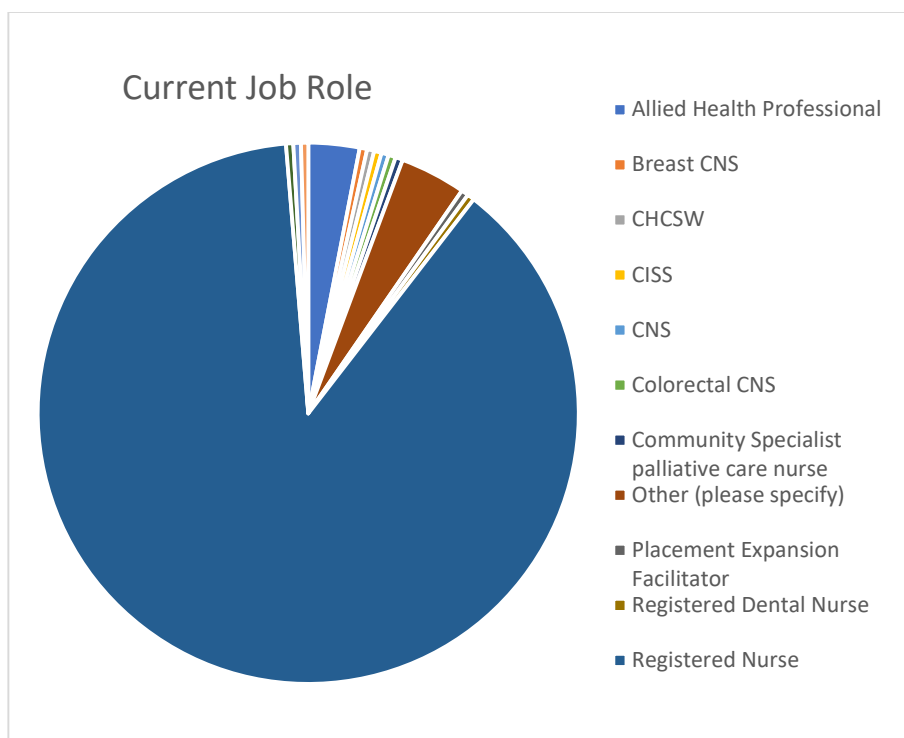


Image 4: Aspirant by Job Role

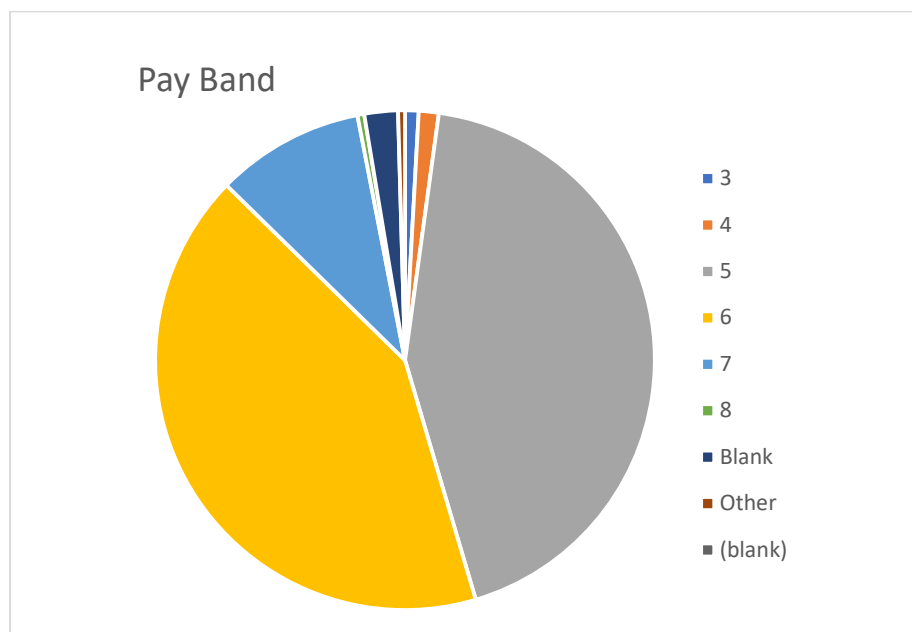
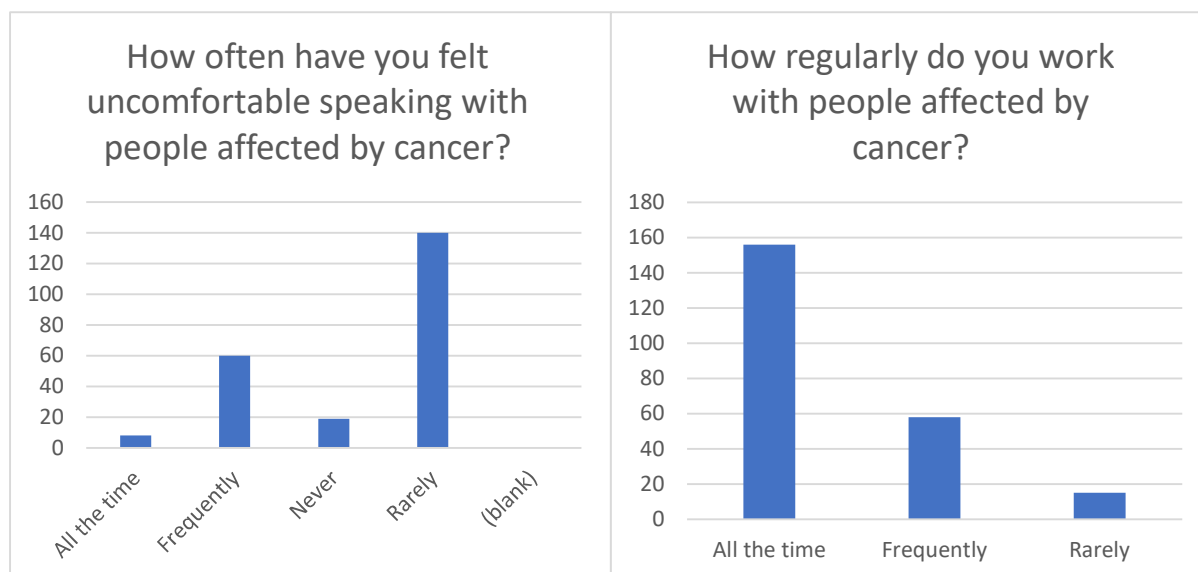
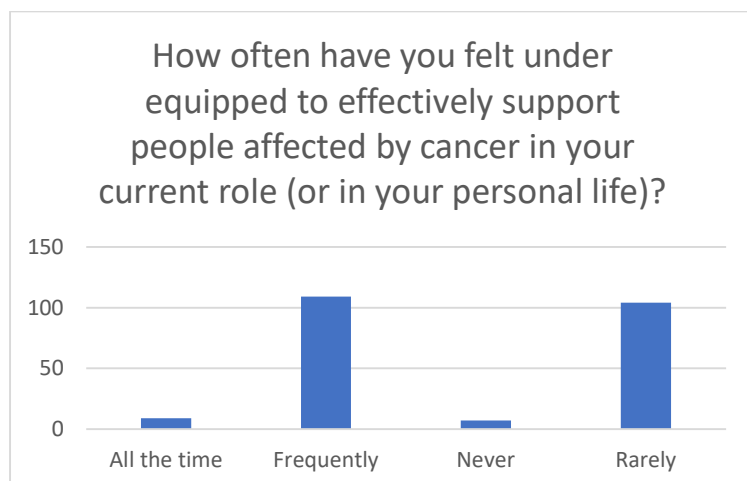


Image 5: Aspirant by Agenda for Change pay band

Pre-Course (Online) Evaluation

Completion of the **pre-course** Evaluation form captured how often Aspirants worked with people affected by cancer, how often they have felt under-equipped to do so and how often they felt uncomfortable speaking with people in the cancer trajectory (amongst other questions including Trust Names). This approach gave a baseline for assessing how they felt they had benefitted from the programme, having later completed the post-course valuation form. The graphics below indicate that most of the Aspirants already work with people affected by cancer either *all the time* or *frequently*, with equal numbers feeling under equipped either *frequently* or *rarely*.

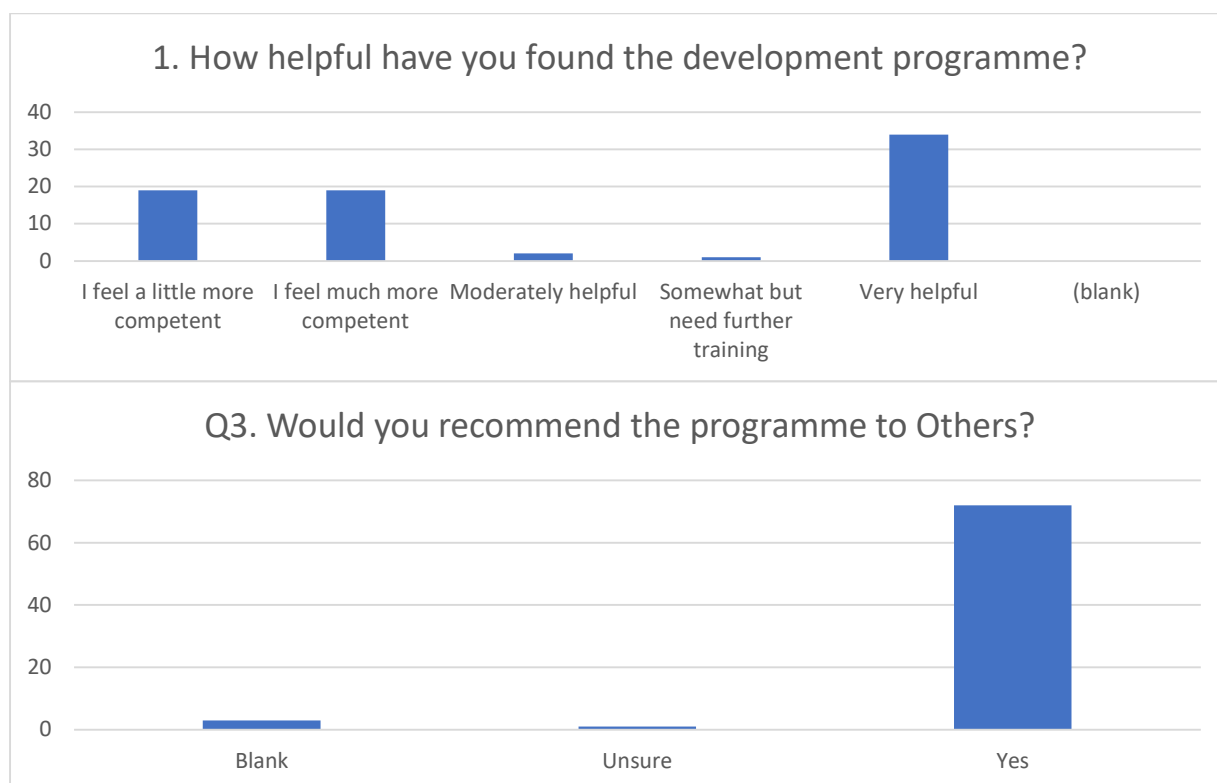




Images 6, 7 and 8: Aspirant responses

Post-Course (Online) Evaluation

To offer a comparison, Aspirants were required to complete a form after completing the online programme. Responses demonstrate that Aspirants found the programme either *moderately helpful*, *very helpful*, and that they felt either *much more* or a *little more competent*. When asked if they would recommend the programme to others, most Respondents to this question (77%) confirmed that they would.



Images 9 and 10: Aspirant responses

Initially Aspirants were asked to rate how 'confident' they felt speaking with people affected by cancer, after completing the programme; however, the terminology was amended to replace the word 'confident' with 'competent' following discussion amongst the LCNs working

group. Responses to both are shown in *Image 11*, which shows that 46 respondents confirmed that they felt *much more competent* (28), *very comfortable* (12) or *very competent* (6), with a further 17 feeling *moderately comfortable* (5) or *moderately competent* (12), 11 felt a *little more competent* and only 2 felt either *somewhat competent* or *not competent at all* (1+1).

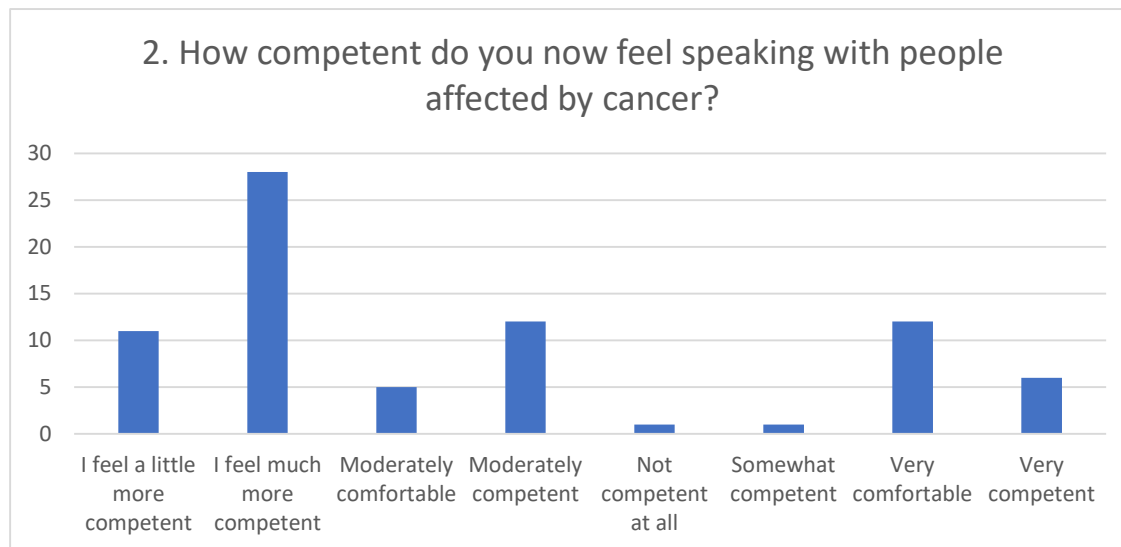


Image 11: Aspirant responses

When asked if Aspirants felt the programme has improved their knowledge of cancer and related topics, 100% of respondents replied *yes*. Of the 76 Respondents asked if they were now more likely to consider applying for a job as a cancer CNS if a vacancy arose, ten people were still *unsure* and four responded *no*, with three leaving the question *blank*. The vast majority (59) confirmed that they would apply for this role in the future (*Image 12*). This is suggestive of having achieved the overall aim of attracting more registered nurses to the role of cancer CNS.

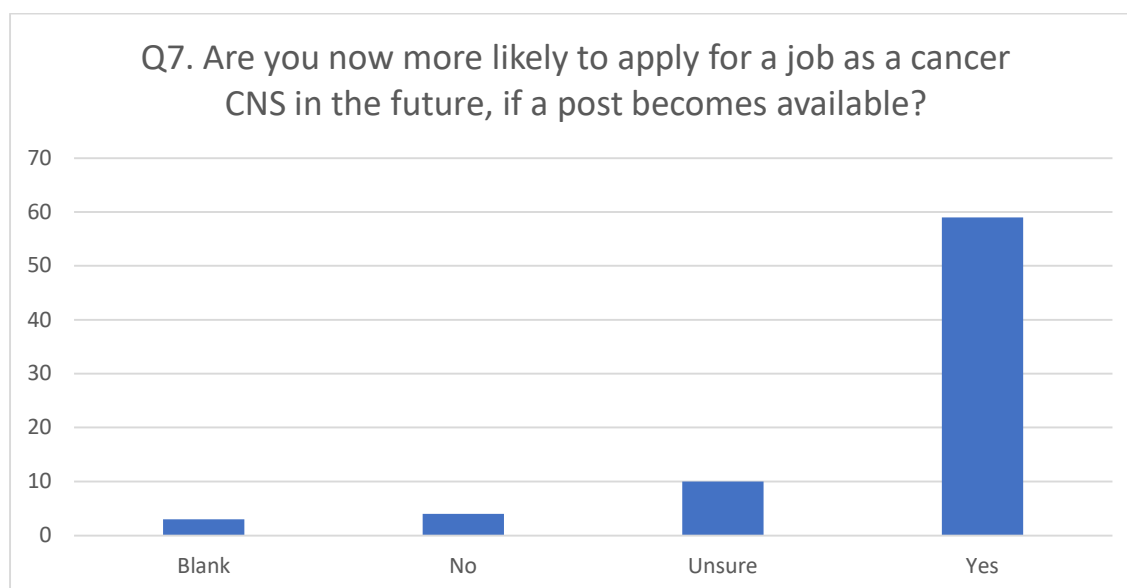


Image 12: Aspirant responses

Experiential learning

Amongst the EMCA Lead Cancer Nurses, some expressed a desire to offer local experiential learning to those who have completed the Programme, who wished to gain further insight and experience within their Trust. Whilst the availability differs between Trusts, the contact details for all EMCA Lead Cancer Nurses were published within the Programme and Aspirants encouraged to make contact to discuss this possibility further.

Evaluation forms for *before* and *after* any experiential learning, have also been developed and agreed by the group, to evaluate this element of development. Published on the online programme under the 'Experiential Learning' section, Aspirants will be encouraged by facilitating LCNs, to complete the forms before and after they undertake any element of experiential learning. On completion of the post-experiential learning evaluation form, the Aspirant will be sent an additional certificate to evidence this.

Appointment to cancer CNS Posts

The number of Aspirants who have completed the programme and been successfully appointed to a cancer CNS post, is difficult to collate. The overseeing of recruitment and management of CNSs varies throughout the NHS and is interchangeably led by the CNS Team Lead, Matron or LCN; therefore, this information is interesting but not always indicative of the landscape.

Initially attempting to capture this information six months after the Programme was launched, via questionnaire by the Programme Lead and LCNs, offered an indication of how many posts were advertised during the period and roughly how many appointed had completed the EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Development Programme.

The EMCA LCNs directly involved in recruitment of CNSs completed the following information as a baseline, which detailed information by Trust including number of vacancies, appointments and the number of successful candidates who had completed the Programme. Given the inequity of this data, no further insights were sought.

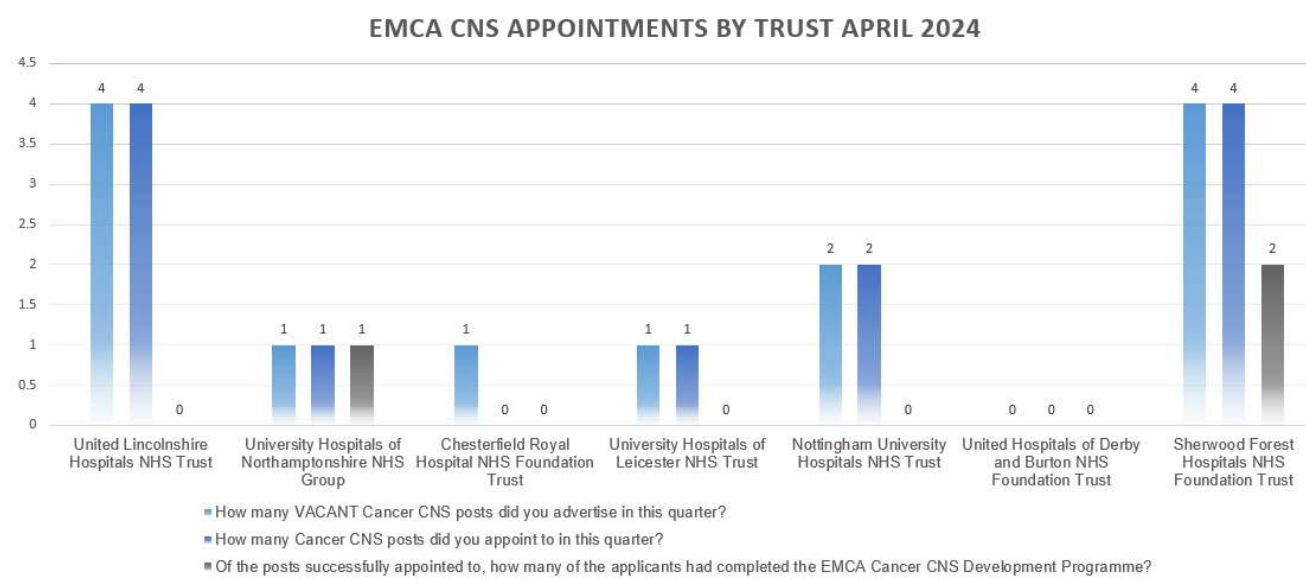


Image 13: EMCA CNS Appointments by Trust after six months post-Launch (April 2024)

Conclusion

Since launching on 9th October 2023, the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme has attracted large numbers of visitors to site, views, and subsequent engagement through the setting up of learning accounts, by which Aspirants can demonstrate 20 CPD accredited learning hours relating to cancer and the support of those affected by it.

Accessed via the EMCA Website, the unique URL address (emcaaspirantcns.nhs.uk) or via the QR Code on relevant Posters, this easily accessed, online programme provides a concise, structured curriculum accessing high quality teaching modules designed to equip registered nurses and offer an introduction to the role of CNS within the cancer workforce.

The Programme is freely available to all, irrespective of current cancer alliance alignment; however, we are pleased to have been approached by other Cancer Alliances, including the West Midlands Cancer Alliance and Wessex Cancer Alliance, who have asked to share the EMCA Aspirant Cancer CNS Development Programme with their workforce.

Data demonstrates that the initial aim of attracting Band 5 registered nurses to consider the role of a cancer CNS, has been achieved with a wide range of additional bands, roles and other allied healthcare roles (including dental nurses, support workers) also completing the programme. Of the data gathered through the LCNs, 12 of the 13 vacant CNS Posts filled within the last quarter, included three Aspirants who had completed the Programme launched only six months ago. There is evidence that several individuals already working as a CNS (or nurse) within the cancer workforce have also found it beneficial to enhance their existing knowledge and skillset.

Mapping the EMCA Programme to the ACCEND Framework led to the addition of modules that would support staff to demonstrate their capability or continued professional development in certain competencies. This widened the scope of the programme as modules added enhanced cancer care within both primary and secondary care settings. Inclusion of learning modules on *Frailty in Cancer*, *Oncological Emergencies*, *Trauma-informed Care* and *Consent* are applicable to clinical and non-clinical professionals in contact with all patients.

The Programme has also been included within the EMCA Primary Care Cancer Training and Education Academy, which can be accessed via the EMCA Website, and is aimed at supporting the training and education of all clinical and non-clinical healthcare professionals.

Further the release of the Programme, Frequently Asked Questions and a Webinar featuring the Programme Lead, developers Volute and an Aspirant who had completed the programme, can also be found on the Website.

The Programme could be further developed to cater for clinical and non-clinical staff in Primary Care settings, as well as other roles including AHPs such as Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Dieticians, for example.

Update as of Feb 2025

- In November 2024 the EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Development Programme won the **Excellence In Collaboration award** from East Midlands Chamber.

- The EMCA Aspirant Cancer Nurse Specialist Development Programme has reached over **30,500 views**:
 - **545** people have signed up for a personal learning account.
 - **4,597** people having viewed the site **30,504** times, spending an average time of **1.26hrs** on the site, the numbers continue to climb.
- In addition to our East Midlands Aspirants, we have seen many primary and secondary care Nurses, AHPs and non-clinical colleagues from other Cancer Alliances around the UK, including West Midlands, Wessex and even Wales and Northern Ireland, sign up too.

Bibliography

[Cancer Workforce in England 2017 report \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#)

[addressing-the-gap-report \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#)

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Macmillan Cancer Support (2021b) *Cancer Nursing on the Line*. Available at: [Forgotten-C-Nursing-Report tcm9-360416.pdf \(macmillan.org.uk\)](#). (Accessed 2 April 2024).